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Feasibility



Top photo: NPS, bottom photos © Rich Reid / Colors of Nature

5. Feasibility

Introduction

To be feasible as a new unit of the National Park System, an area must:

- (1) be of sufficient size and appropriate configuration to ensure sustainable resource protection and visitor enjoyment (taking into account current and potential impacts from sources beyond proposed park boundaries); and
- (2) be capable of efficient administration by the NPS at a reasonable cost.

In evaluating feasibility, the NPS considers a variety of factors, such as: size; boundary configurations; current and potential uses of the study area and surrounding lands; land ownership patterns; public enjoyment potential; costs associated with acquisition, development, restoration, and operation; access; current and potential threats to the resources; existing degradation of resources; staffing requirements; local planning and zoning for the study area; the level of local and general public support; and the economic/ socioeconomic impacts of designation as a unit of the national park system. The feasibility evaluation also considers the ability of the NPS to undertake new management responsibilities in light of current and projected constraints on funding and personnel.¹

Feasibility Issues

BOUNDARY SIZE AND CONFIGURATION

An acceptable boundary for an envisioned unit of the National Park System should provide for the inclusion and protection of the primary resource; sufficient surrounding area to provide a proper setting for the resource or to interrelate a group of resources; and sufficient land for appropriate use and development.

The Gaviota Coast Feasibility Study area includes approximately 215,000 acres of land along 76 miles of coastline. The study area includes the

coastal watersheds and all of Vandenberg AFB. The study area includes and protects nationally significant resources and provides a setting for these resources. Public access and visitor facilities are provided by federal, state, and county governments, and private organizations. Areas smaller than the full study area could also be of adequate size for NPS designation.

LAND USE, OWNERSHIP PATTERNS, PLANNING AND ZONING

Vandenberg AFB (99,500 acres, 46% of the study area). The primary purpose of the base is to support space and missile launch activities, however 67% of the base is unimproved and contains significant natural and cultural resources as well as limited public recreation opportunities. Base security, launch safety and encroachment of other uses onto the base and nearby lands have been primary concerns of the US Air Force throughout this study process. In addition, recent world events have led to heightened security at military bases and placed the potential for increased public access at Vandenberg AFB in question.

Los Padres National Forest (20,400 acres, 9.5% of the study area). These lands are currently managed by the US Forest Service (USFS) for multiple use, including public recreation. Inclusion of National Forest-managed lands within a national park unit boundary is a viable option. However, this approach generally is used in the context of direct NPS management of other nearby land, and coordinated management between the two agencies. Transfer of land from the USFS to the NPS is also possible, but Congress and the USFS have been increasingly unwilling to support this type of transfer.

California State Parks and Beaches (5,500 acres, 2.5% of the study area). These lands are currently managed by the California Department of Parks and Recreation for public recreation and resource protection purposes. Inclusion of state park lands within a national park unit boundary is

possible, but would make sense primarily in the context of direct NPS management of other nearby land, and coordinated management between the two agencies. State park land has at times been transferred to NPS for management, but the trend in recent decades has been toward collaborative management of related national and state parks.

Private Land (87,930 acres, 41% of the study area). Private lands in the study area include agricultural land, residences, industrial areas and commercial facilities. A substantial amount of the private property within the study area is owned in large tracts. Over 50,000 acres within the study area are held within 11 tracts of 1,000 acres or more, including 24,250 acres of Bixby Ranch. Most of this land is currently zoned agricultural, with minimum lot sizes of 100-320 acres.

A number of landowners within the study area have communicated to the NPS that they are unwilling to sell their land to the NPS. The NPS has not asked any landowners to sell; this information has been provided independently by the landowners. A substantial number of additional landowners have written to the NPS to indicate either their opposition to NPS involvement in the area or their desire that this feasibility study be stopped. These landowners are also assumed to be unwilling sellers. The landowners thus expressing their lack of interest in selling land to the NPS represent a significant majority of the private land within the study area.

ACCESS AND PUBLIC ENJOYMENT POTENTIAL

The study area is just outside the City of Santa Barbara and includes a portion of the newly incorporated City of Goleta. The southern and eastern section of the study area is easily accessible by U.S. Highway 101, although coastal access is limited in some areas by private land and the small number of freeway exits and turnouts. The coastal shelf, or area between the foothills and shore, is narrow in certain places, leaving little room for other roads or parking. El Capitan and Refugio state beaches and Gaviota State Park provide parking and other amenities for recreational visitors. Coastal

access west of Gaviota State Park is very limited, due to large private land holdings closed to the public at Hollister, Western Gate and Bixby Ranches. Beach access is available at Jalama Beach County Park, between Bixby Ranch and Vandenberg AFB.

The north half of the study area is predominantly occupied by Vandenberg AFB. Public access to the coast is limited to Ocean Beach and Surf Beach, within a public right-of-way which cuts through the base from Lompoc. Public use of these beaches is also restricted seven months of the year during the nesting season of the federally-listed threatened western snowy plover. Point Sal State Beach just north of the base is currently accessible only to hikers due to poor road conditions.

Scenery on the Santa Barbara coast is world-renowned. Striking coastal views are available from U.S. Highway 101 and existing publicly accessible lands. The coastal route of the Southern Pacific Railroad traverses much of the study area's coastline, affording rail passengers spectacular coastal views, including along private and military land otherwise closed to the public.

Public enjoyment potential within the study area is significant, including opportunities for a wide variety of recreational activities, including world-class surfing, hiking, diving, swimming, sunbathing, beach combing, whale watching, birding, boating, sport fishing, picnicking, camping, bicycling, horseback riding, nature study, photography, and painting.

EXISTING RESOURCE DEGRADATION AND THREATS TO THE RESOURCES

Natural and cultural resources within the study area are generally of high quality and have a high degree of integrity. Santa Barbara County has a long history of resource protection through zoning and conservation programs. Nevertheless, there are current impacts to these resources, and threats of further impacts.

- A combination of residential, commercial and industrial uses, roads, grazing and irrigated agriculture have, in many areas, replaced

native vegetation with pavement, buildings, and non-native vegetation. Existing commercial and industrial facilities include a 360-room resort on the coastal bluff with recreational and conference facilities, three oil processing facilities, and the county landfill. Roads include U. S. Highway 101, a major limited-access freeway close to the coast.

- Water quality has improved in recent decades, but is still problematic. Between 1996-98 the seven Santa Barbara County beaches experienced 1,485 beach advisories and 850 beach closures due to water quality problems. The majority of these closures were attributed to high bacteria counts.
- Impacts to scenic resources include the residential, commercial and industrial land uses mentioned above, plus utility poles and lines that traverse much of the coast alongside the roads and highways.
- The study area contains 24 federally or state-listed threatened or endangered plant and animal species and another 60 species of rare and special concern. These species are threatened by a variety of factors, including residential, commercial, industrial and agricultural development, human disturbance, invasive species, trampling, soil loss, predation, beaver activity, instream barriers, reduced water flow, water quality, aquifer drawdown, and off-road vehicles.
- The distinctive oak woodlands of the study area may be threatened by Sudden Oak Death (*Phytophthora ramorum*). Bishop pine forest in the area may be threatened by a fungal disease known as pitch canker.
- Archeological and historic sites are threatened by urban growth, agricultural development, erosion, fire, off-road vehicle use, unauthorized collecting of artifacts, and vandalism. The ranching landscape of the area is threatened by economic changes that make ranching less economically viable.
- Additional development of land will likely occur within the study area within the limits set by existing zoning. Several large ranches

have been put on the market in recent years at prices that could not be economically supported by continued ranching. Golf courses have been proposed. The right to higher density development than current zoning would allow has been established by a court decision at Naples. Further development throughout the study area could occur if policy changes are made by the Santa Barbara County Board of Supervisors or the California Coastal Commission.

PUBLIC INTEREST AND SUPPORT

Public interest in the Gaviota Coast Feasibility Study process has been extremely high throughout the study process. Public opinion has been highly polarized, including both strong support for, and strong opposition to, NPS involvement on the Gaviota Coast, as well as support for and opposition to, completion of the feasibility study process. The NPS has received thousands of letters, postcards, petition signatures, and e-mail messages representing this range of perspectives.

Landowners within the study area appear to overwhelmingly oppose NPS involvement in the area. Several local groups have formed to oppose NPS involvement, and/or to develop plans for locally-based conservation of the area's resources. These groups include Common Ground, the Gaviota Study Group, and the Coastal Stewardship Council. National and regional organizations have organized their members to communicate with the NPS about the study process, including the Sierra Club, Surfrider Foundation, National Parks Conservation Association, and the American Land Rights Association.

SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC IMPACT

Designation of the Gaviota Coast study area or some portion of it as a unit of the National Park System would likely have a number of economic and social impacts on the area, both beneficial and adverse.

Social and economic impacts of NPS designation could vary widely depending on the size and scope of the park unit, the management approach, amount of public land acquisition, and external

variables such as local, regional and national economic forces, and the actions of local public and private organizations and individuals.

Possible socioeconomic impact topics could include: visitation to the area, visitation to other parks and attractions, traffic levels, road maintenance and improvements, short term impacts to the local economy from development of new facilities, expenditures from park operations and park staff, expenditures by visitors, sales and hotel tax revenues from visitor expenditures, visitor-related businesses, law enforcement costs, trespass on private lands, tax base, property tax revenues, changes in property values, and housing availability.

COSTS ASSOCIATED WITH ACQUISITION, DEVELOPMENT, RESTORATION AND OPERATION

Land acquisition. No formal land cost estimates have been done as part of this feasibility study. However, numerous properties in the area have been sold or offered for sale in recent years. Using those properties as a guide, land values appear to range from \$2,500 to \$10,000 per acre for land with limited development potential. Properties with houses or significant development potential appear to sell for \$30,000 to \$100,000 per acre and up.

Without detailed land cost estimates, some general estimates using basic assumptions can still provide a sense of what land acquisition costs could be for a unit of the National Park System in this area. A National Seashore with 30,000 acres to be acquired at \$5,000 per acre would cost \$150 million. A National Reserve with 2,500 acres to be acquired could cost \$15 million, assuming acquisition of 2,400 acres at \$5,000 per acre, and 100 acres of critical, development prone land at \$30,000 per acre. These are very rough scenarios for NPS land costs only, and do not include typical overhead costs for land acquisition such as title, appraisal, survey, and environmental site assessment; nor do they attempt to reflect what existing public and private organizations might contribute in funds or land to the establishment of a possible park unit.

Over the last five years, NPS land acquisition

budgets nationally have ranged from approximately \$75 million to \$139 million. Few parks receive more than \$3 million in any given fiscal year for land acquisition. Funds for land acquisition are highly competitive, and considerable public and political support is necessary for significant funding to be appropriated.

Development Costs. No formal estimates of development costs have been undertaken as part of this feasibility study. Development costs of new national park units vary widely, depending on the existing conditions and facilities, and the types of conditions and facilities desired. New national park units frequently invest resources in inventorying and documenting the resources in the park, developing management or treatment plans for those resources, developing educational and interpretive materials, and developing or improving facilities for visitors and for park operations.

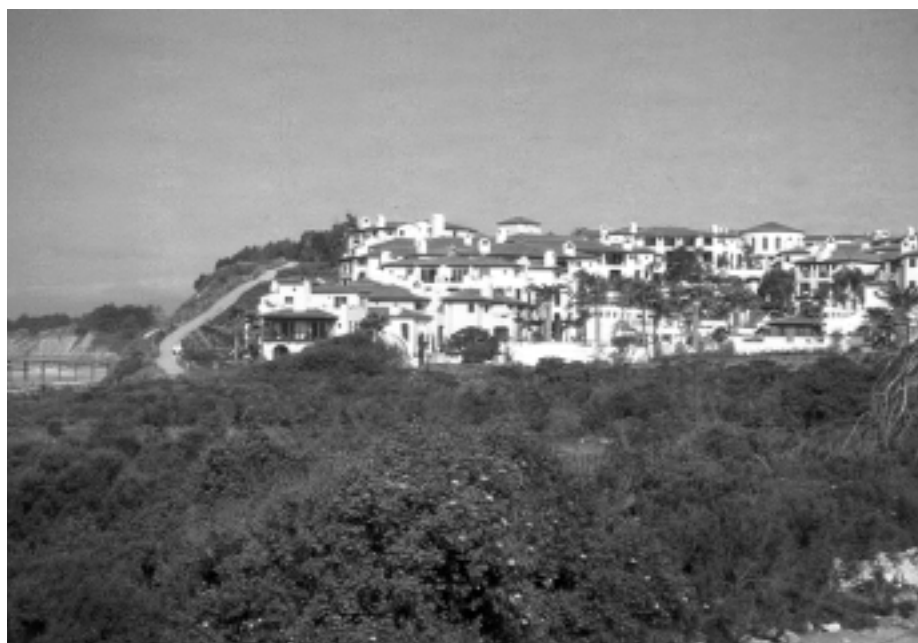
Operations Costs. Operations costs of national park units vary widely, depending on the amount and type of resources managed, number of visitors, level of programs offered, safety and security issues, and many other factors. Table 6: National Park Unit Annual Operating Budget shows the operations budgets for fiscal year 2002 of several parks that could be comparable to a national park unit along the Gaviota Coast.

While no formal estimates of operating costs have been completed for this study, these examples illustrate the potential range. The NPS operating budget for a National Reserve at the Gaviota Coast could be under \$500,000 per year. National Reserves are highly dependent on partnerships with other organizations for operations and management, and would require significant financial commitments from local, state, or private partners. A more traditional, larger National Park unit could require an annual operating budget of \$2-5 million.

Table 6: National Park Unit Annual Operating Budget

National Park Unit	Annual Operating Budget (FY 2002)
Boston Harbor Islands National Recreation Area, MA	\$740,000
Cabrillo National Historic Site, CA	\$1,261,000
Canaveral National Seashore, FL	\$2,225,000
Cape Cod National Seashore, MA	\$5,811,000
City of Rocks National Reserve, ID *	\$310,000
Ebey's Landing National Historic Reserve, WA *	\$211,000
Point Reyes National Seashore, CA	\$4,906,000
Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area, CA	\$5,203,000

* Reflects NPS operating budgets only. Does not include operating costs of state, local and non-profit management organizations.



Bacara Resort, NPS

Feasibility Analysis

The NPS considers a variety of factors in evaluating the feasibility of NPS designations. These factors and related feasibility issues are summarized in Table 7: Feasibility Analysis.

Table 7 : Feasibility Analysis

Feasibility factors	Issues and Conclusions	NPS Management Feasible?
Boundary size and configuration	The study area is of adequate size to include and protect the nationally significant resources of the Gaviota Coast. It provides ample surrounding area to provide an appropriate setting for the resources. It includes sufficient area to allow for appropriate visitor use and any necessary facilities. Areas smaller than the full study area could also be of adequate size for NPS designation.	✓ Yes
Land use, ownership patterns, planning and zoning	Current land use, ownership patterns, planning and zoning would not preclude designation as a national park unit. Land ownership patterns are such that acquisition of a relatively small number of properties could provide a core of land and resources that could be managed as a national park unit. However, the NPS has concluded that land sufficient for the establishment of a national park unit is not available for the following reasons: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ a substantial majority of study area landowners have communicated their unwillingness to sell land to NPS; ▪ security concerns at Vandenberg AFB limit public access; ▪ legislatures and agencies desire to keep USFS and State lands under current management. 	X No
Access and public enjoyment potential	The study area provides a mix of areas with easy access and those with more limited access. Additional access may be possible in some areas, and inappropriate in others due to resource sensitivity. Areas that are currently inaccessible could become more accessible through public acquisition of a relatively small number of properties. Public enjoyment potential is significant.	✓ Yes
Existing resource degradation and threats to the resources	Natural and cultural resources within the study area are generally of high quality and have a high degree of integrity. Current impacts and future threats to those resources are not at a level that would preclude designation of a national park unit.	✓ Yes

Feasibility factors	Issues and Conclusions	NPS Management Feasible?
Public interest and support	The strong opposition to NPS involvement expressed by study area landowners and other residents of the region makes it unlikely that NPS management would be authorized by Congress, or that efficient park development and management could occur.	X No
Social and economic impact	Designation of a national park unit would likely have economic and social impacts, both beneficial and adverse. These impacts have not been analyzed, but would not necessarily preclude designation of a national park unit.	✓ Yes
Costs associated with acquisition, development, restoration and operation	Acquisition, development and operations budgets could be relatively moderate for a National Reserve or other limited designation, if combined with substantial financial commitments from local, state and private partners. Any new park unit will add costs to the operation of the National Park System. Within the context of the commitments of the President, Secretary of Interior and Director of the NPS to address the NPS deferred maintenance backlog and other national financial priorities, the NPS is not able to undertake new land acquisition and management responsibilities of this potential cost and magnitude at this time.	X No

Summary Statement: Feasibility

The NPS finds that the Gaviota Coast study area is not a feasible addition to the National Park system at this time for the following reasons:

- Land sufficient for the establishment of a national park unit does not appear to be available to the NPS;
- It is unlikely, due to strong opposition expressed by study area landowners, that efficient park development and management could occur;
- Within the context of the commitments of the President, Secretary of the Interior, and Director of the NPS to address other national financial priorities, the NPS is not able to undertake new land acquisition and management responsibilities of this potential cost and magnitude.

When NPS management of an area is determined to be infeasible, NPS Management Policies specify that alternatives for NPS management of that area will not be developed. Therefore, alternatives that include NPS management of the Gaviota Coast are not analyzed in this report.

Management options that were developed before the feasibility determination was made are described in Section 6, Management Options. Two alternatives that do not include NPS management are presented in Section 7, Alternatives. Their environmental and socioeconomic impacts are analyzed in an Environmental Assessment.

Notes

1. National Park Service. 2001. *National Park Service Management Policies*. United States Department of the Interior.